

PI External Reviews: Summary of Report Peacebuilding and Reconstruction (PBR)

Report to IDRC Board of Governors
March 2004

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Summary prepared by Evaluation Unit

PI Aims

1. PBR's objectives, as set out in its 2000 *Prospectus*, are:
 - 1.1. To enhance knowledge and understanding of three key aspects of post-war transitions: democratization, human security, and the political economy of peacebuilding;
 - 1.2. To contribute to research capacity building, policy development and institutional arrangements that support transitions from violent conflict to peace and security and sustainable development at the local, national, regional, or international levels;
 - 1.3. To promote innovative thinking and strategies for sustainable peace through historical and critical analysis of the nature, dynamics and impacts of current peacebuilding agendas;
 - 1.4. To encourage the development of new research methodologies, approaches, tools and partnerships in support of peacebuilding.
2. PBR focuses on Southern Africa, the Middle East, and Central America, while noting the importance of cross-regional and global work. PBR also set out to address challenges to peace—defined in the *Prospectus* as an exploration of “contested visions of peace and the nagging problems in peacemaking, peacebuilding and conflict prevention from a historical and critical perspective”. The prospectus emphasises the value of networking, and the role of PBR as a “knowledge conveyor” in the peacebuilding field.

Review Methodology

3. This evaluation is based on extensive review of project and program documentation, an email survey of projects, six field visits, and more than fifty interviews with PI staff, southern partners and others in Africa, Latin America, and the Middle East.

Review Findings

4. Overall, the reviewers were impressed with the **intellectual quality and practical contributions** made by most of the projects supported by PBR during this period. This has been true despite the obstacles generated by massive staff turnover in late 2001, as well as the institutional dislocation caused by IDRC's closure of ROSA.
5. PBR has **met most of the broad objectives** in its *Prospectus*. It has enhanced theoretical and practical understanding of war-to-peace transitions, contributed to policy development, networking, and southern capacity-building, and promoted new thinking and innovative approaches.

6. PBR has built a **geographically well-rounded portfolio**, diversifying significantly since its last external review. While it has nominally pursued programming in four thematic areas (democratization, the political economy of conflict, human security, and “challenges to peace”) these categories have proven highly porous. The reviewers support what has emerged as PBR’s *de facto programming strategy* of supporting a broad range of innovative programming on peacebuilding, while developing synergistic research “clusters” around particular issues or contexts.
7. Some of PBR’s **outputs** have been of high quality. For example, the project “Judicial Observatory in Guatemala” (RP101471) is developing a comprehensive methodology that will let civil society monitor and analyse the operation of its justice system. This kind of research product is on the cutting edge of what peace-building must be about – not so much avoiding a return to war as ensuring justice, and providing civil society with the means to acquire and analyse the knowledge necessary to participate in the ongoing reconstruction of the state’s institutions. In the Middle East, some of the work has been of extremely high technical and intellectual quality despite extraordinarily difficult conditions. There have been some excellent outputs produced in PBR’s global projects.
8. Most of the **results** achieved by PBR-supported projects are very substantial. In general, programming in Latin America is the strongest undertaken by the PI, with excellent projects also supported in the Middle East and in PBR’s “global” portfolio. PBR’s African programming has been more uneven, in part because of staff change and dislocation associated with the closure of ROSA and PBR’s consequent shift to ESARO and WARO.
9. Although PBR identified two “**flagship**” **projects** in its last *Prospectus*, both have been disappointments. The Mine Action Program was disrupted by the closure of ROSA, among other factors. The development of Peace and Conflict Impact Assessment (PCIA) has confronted a variety of challenges inherent in the issue, and PBR has adapted by reducing its ambitions and shifting from a “lead role” to more of a “supporting actor”.
10. **Outcomes** of PBR’s work include:
 - 10.1. The production of **local interpretation and analysis**, addressing critical issues and generating new insights, and the **dissemination** of research findings;
 - 10.2. **Strengthened capacities** for research, for project and financial management, and for facilitating and engaging in ongoing policy dialogues with a wide range of constituencies. PBR has played a particularly significant role in this respect with its support of the Regularization of Land Tenure in Guatemala (CNPT), a group of researchers who have largely taught themselves—with PBR

accompaniment and support—the complicated substantive and legal material necessary to draft a legislative proposal concerning land tenure;

- 10.3. Strengthened information sharing, **dialogue** and communication. In the *Middle East*, PBR support for Applied Research Institute—Jerusalem, Palestine (ARIJ) stands out as an exemplary case of both widespread information sharing and capacity building. ARIJ's work has been widely disseminated and utilized both inside and outside the region, notably through its website (<http://www.arij.org>), which has received over 3.6 million hits, and which serves over 1,000 pages per day to visitors;
- 10.4. The development of new partnerships and new **networks** (e.g. among academic and non-governmental institutions), and the strengthening of existing networks have both been important. The Southern African Reconciliation Study, for instance, created a working relationship among NGOs in five countries. They will continue to work together even after their IDRC-funded project is completed;
- 10.5. The feeding of research into analytical and **policy** debates has been undertaken. It is noted that more emphasis could be placed on output dissemination to achieve this outcome. The engagement of PBR's partners with state actors and the political process is encouraging, and there is at least an openness to the kinds of policies being advocated, although it may take longer for this general acceptance to crystallise in concrete legislative and policy reforms.
11. Southern partners generally have high praise for **the work of PBR staff**, and especially their intellectual input and support for local capacity-building.
12. In general, PBR projects have been better at **reaching** formal researchers, officials and opinion leaders than grassroots activists, non-traditional researchers, and members of local power structures (this is a challenge inherent in almost all research programming in developing countries). There have been some notable successes, however, which have brought in grassroots activists, or give direct or indirect voice to those who often otherwise go unheard.
13. There have been significant weaknesses in the effective **use of information and communication technologies**. Not only have several PBR-supported ICT projects been disappointing, but PBR's own use of ICTs to disseminate its work has been unimpressive. Responsibility for much of this seems to lie at the corporate level, and in particular in deficiencies in IDRC's own "web presence."
14. PBR deserves particular recognition for its very effective integration of **gendered analysis** and critical perspective in its programming, especially in

Latin America and the Middle East. Not only has PBR supported numerous local projects with an explicit gender focus (for example; Gender Equity and Peacebuilding; the Arab family; Palestinian Refugee Women and Children; Gender and Citizenship; Gendering the Colombian Peace Process; and Guatemalan Women's Associations—among others), but it has also worked closely with local partners to introduce gendered analysis into projects that may have lacked this component at the outset.

15. While the review found no research ethics problems in any of the projects reviewed, there is a need for PBR to develop guidelines, procedures, or “lessons-learned” addressing the *particular **ethical challenges** of research programming in conflict-prone areas*.
16. Project **evaluations** have been useful tools for identifying strengths, weaknesses, and potential follow-ons to prior work. Less formal PBR “think pieces” have often been particularly impressive in offering a synthetic and holistic assessment of PBR performance.
17. A number of **strengths and weaknesses** can be found in PBR's strategies. Among these, workload issues may threaten the ability of PBR staff to deliver the quality of programming they wish to undertake. In some regions, networking has proven effective, although less so elsewhere – as much a function of issue, geography, and politics as it is of PBR initiative. PBR grants vary in magnitude; the evaluation team sees no reason to change this mix.
18. PBR's **portfolio** consists of projects usually responsive to local needs and connected to broader debates. Several (although not all) of the weaknesses in the portfolio of projects are related to staff turnover and institutional change.
19. Recent discussions among PBR staff as to future programming strategy point to a good grasp on **the programming environment** faced by PBR, its potential value-added, and how best to target future initiatives. The PBR team has placed growing emphasis on raising critical questions about the presumptions, successes, failures and interests involved in the peacebuilding enterprise.

Issues for Consideration

20. A challenge will be maintaining the global (and, in practice, often Northern) intellectual profile of IDRC's engagement in peacebuilding while focusing its resources on local, Southern partners. Enhancing the PBR's role as a “knowledge conveyor” will be critical to do this, confirming IDRC's status as “not another think tank,” but rather as an action-oriented research donor in genuine partnership with the South.